

VZCZCXRO2651

RR RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA
RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHNP RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHRS RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHTA #0959/01 1590237
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 080237Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASTANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5548
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE 1637
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1013
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1716
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0143
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFAAA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC 1198
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC 1114
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHAST/USOFFICE ALMATY 1589

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASTANA 000959

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARMENT FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, ECA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [ENRG](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: KOSTENAI, THE WHEAT AND SLAVIC HEARTLAND OF
KAZAKHSTAN

ASTANA 00000959 001.2 OF 003

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: On May 24-26, the Charge d'Affaires visited Kostanai -- a northern city of 250,000 people located in a heavily agricultural area -- to attend a concert by visiting American jazz musicians and to open Kazakhstan's ninth American Corner. Kostanai is Kazakhstan's largest wheat producing region and the only oblast with an Akim (Governor) of Slavic Heritage. The Charge also met with Kostanai Akim Sergey Kulagin, toured a local school and art gallery, visited with Peace Corps volunteers and alumni of U.S.-sponsored exchange programs, and enjoyed an immense display of Kazakhstani hospitality. The Charge's trip was the first ever visit by a high-level embassy official to Kostanai, and local officials were keen to put their best foot forward. END SUMMARY.

MEETING WITH KOSTENAI AKIM

13. (SBU) Kostanai Oblast Akim Sergey Kulagin opened the meeting with the Charge by noting that the people of Kostanai love jazz. He said he hoped that the Charge had had an opportunity to hear Kostanai's professional musicians firsthand. Kulagin said that his first experience with the United States had been in 1994, when he signed an agreement for technical exchange in the area of agriculture, and that he had visited the United States last year. He stressed that agricultural cooperation and trade -- particularly related to chicken legs -- was "very successful."

14. (SBU) Turning to the topic of the upcoming Foreign Investors' Council meeting, Kulagin said it would take place in Kostanai because "President Nazarbayev trusts us." He stated that he hoped the meeting would draw the attention of foreign investors to Kostanai oblast. Kulagin noted that one of his oblast's biggest projects is a brown coal field and said he hoped that investors would soon construct a power station.

15. (SBU) The Charge replied that the idea of a power station was a good one, but that coal technology should be as "green" as possible. He suggested that U.S.-Kazakhstani ventures in areas such as wind and solar power could be fruitful and noted that Foreign Minister Tazhin had recently met with Secretary of Energy Chu. The Charge

also stressed that the United States would like to see all of Central Asia united in one common energy network. (COMMENT: The following day, the oblast web-site had added a notation on the average number of sunny days per year. END COMMENT.)

¶6. (SBU) Kulagin responded that there had been a common power grid in Soviet times. He said Kostanai had previously received energy from a power station 200 kilometers away in Russia, but now received it from Ekibastuz, a city in Kazakhstan located more than 1,000 kilometers away. Kulagin also said that a wind study was ongoing and that he hoped for conclusions next year. In addition, he noted that Kostanai had a biofuel project designed to produce ethanol but said he was against the idea of producing ethanol from grain. "Maybe in Brazil it is okay," he stressed, "but here it is not a good idea. If it is from corn, livestock will have problems; if it is from grain, people will have problems."

¶7. (SBU) Kulagin said that Kostanai is ready to cooperate with U.S. investors, but warned that they "shouldn't be late." He noted that Kostanai has many Russian investors, as well as Canadian companies already working in agriculture, gold, and copper.

RHYTHM ROADS GROUP JAZZ QUARTET PLAYS TO A PACKED HOUSE

¶8. (SBU) The Charge gave opening remarks at an evening performance of the Brian Horton Quartet, an American jazz group sponsored by the State Department's Rhythm Roads program in conjunction with Jazz at Lincoln Center. Every one of the Kostanai Philharmonic's 400 seats was filled and there were people standing in the aisles. The audience demonstrated their enthusiasm by showering the musicians with flowers. The quartet's closing number -- a jazz rendition of a traditional Kazakh folk song -- went over particularly well. Deputy Akim of Kostanai Oblast Serik Bekturganov ended the concert by warmly thanking the Embassy for bringing "a piece of America" to

ASTANA 00000959 002.2 OF 003

Kostanai.

¶9. (SBU) Earlier in the day, the Quartet conducted a master class. Local musicians were so enthusiastic about the opportunity to learn from the Quartet that professional musicians from the Kostanai Philharmonic agreed to participate in a joint workshop with student musicians from the Rudny Music College, located in a town 40 minutes away. Nearly 80 people attended the master class, which ended in a jam session.

¶10. (SBU) The desire of the Akimat (regional government) to properly thank the musicians and show off Kazakhstani hospitality continued throughout the evening. At a dinner hosted by the Deputy Akim, the table groaned with food and drink, and every foreign guest received a handmade item of traditional Kazakhstani clothing. This was only the beginning. Dinner was followed by a full program of entertainment designed to show off the oblast's top talent and multi-ethnic character. Each foreign guest had a song specifically dedicated to him or her: there was a Slavic group singing traditional Ukrainian favorites, a Korean chanteuse, a Russian singer-songwriter playing guitar, a performance of famous Kazakh opera pieces by performers from the local opera, and a group of pop singers dressed in shimmering faux-Egyptian wear. An oblast-hosted dinner the following night on May 25 took place in a faux castle, complete with suits of armor, a framed rock that had allegedly been removed from a castle in Scotland, and a wall-length glass cabinet containing at least 100 collectible dolls.

AMERICAN CORNER OPENING

¶11. (SBU) In the morning, the Charge and Deputy Akim Bekturganov presided over the opening of Kazakhstan's ninth American corner at the Kostanai Oblast Scientific Universal Library. Local cultural officials pulled out all the stops to make the opening a memorable event. There were children in traditional Kazakh dress, girls from the local modeling agency, and performances by the bronze medalist in the "rock vocal" category of the World Contest of Performing Arts and the local marching band. The event -- which was attended by approximately 90 guests including government officials, exchange program alumni, teachers of English, Peace Corps volunteers, and

media representatives -- received widespread positive media coverage.

OBLAST OFFICIALS SHOW OFF THEIR CITY

¶12. (SBU) Oblast officials were determined to show off their city in the best possible light and accompanied the Charge as he met with students at a specialized English school and visited a local art gallery. He also participated in a discussion club at the American Corner, at which numerous students performed poems, songs, and even a ballroom dance sequence. A planned visit to the local art school was scrapped when the head of the school failed to demonstrate to local officials that he had adequately choreographed the visit. A walking tour of Kostanai's historic pre-revolutionary buildings was also eliminated by local officials, who preferred instead to show off their "House of Friendship," a government building featuring a "tower of wheat" with rooms dedicated to each nationality that lives in the oblast.

¶13. (SBU) The Charge also hosted six Peace Corps volunteers for lunch and met with alumni of U.S.-sponsored exchange programs. When asked whether the Community Connections program had made a difference in his life one alumnus pumped his fist in the air and said he had been so impressed that upon his return he had been unable to work for a month.

¶14. (SBU) Oblast officials carefully scripted the visit to show off what they thought were their city's best features. A short city tour on the way to the airport centered not on Kostanai's historic buildings, but rather on the newly constructed "French house" -- a building housing a toy museum, shops, and the French Cultural Center. The building is adorned with life-sized bronze statues of Napoleon, Charlie Chaplin, Mary Poppins, and Joan of Arc. It also houses a large clock. At 1:00pm each day, large dolls representing

ASTANA 00000959 003.2 OF 003

Marilyn Monroe, Charlie Chaplin and a clown appear out of the clock and perform a dance. The oblast is attempting to have the clock recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records. The Deputy Akim was also anxious to show off his city's train station and larger-than-life Soviet-era monument commemorating Khrushchev's Virgin Lands Campaign. According to the Deputy Akim, Kostanai's monument is the second-largest monument commemorating workers in the former Soviet Union.

¶15. (SBU) COMMENT: Kostanai is the Russian heartland of Kazakhstan. Kulagin is one of two non-Kazakh Akims (he is of Russian heritage while the other is German.) In many ways the Soviet Union is not forgotten in Kostanai. For example, at the Great Patriotic War (WWII) monument, there was a floral red star with a hammer and sickle in the center in yellow carnations. Moreover, democratic centralism is alive and well. The library director begged us not to tell the Deputy Akim that we had seen her since she had begged off on the second evening of extended dining. She said she was afraid that the Deputy Akim would be very upset that she had worked with us but missed the dinner. However, not everything Soviet is sacred. The head of the Akim's cultural department proudly showed us that they were restoring a wall where over 1,000 White Army officers had been shot. Kostanai seems eager for foreign contact. It may provide fertile soil for commercial opportunities, especially in the agricultural-support sector. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND